

Testimony in Support of HB-6355, An Act Concerning Risk Protection Orders

Senator Winfield, Representative Stafstrom, ranking members Kissel and Fishbein and distinguished members of the Judiciary Committee:

I am from Stamford and a supporter of CT Against Gun Violence. I am a physical therapist who has worked mostly in geriatric rehabilitation. In the course of my work, I observed a child with double vision and imbalance from being shot in the head while playing with a family gun. I have worked in homecare, and I remember feeling relief when I discharged a patient who had guns in a locked display as well as other weapons hanging from hooks by the back door. Like all mothers in Connecticut, I had to figure out how to tell my children about the massacre at Sandy Hook Elementary School in 2012.

Since then, I have had three close relatives who came too close to someone who should clearly not have possessed a gun.

First, on Nov. 3, 2014, my niece learned that a 16 year-old fellow student Sash Alexander Nemphos, at George Washington Carver Center for Arts and Technology, in Towson, MD, had brought a gun to school in his backpack on Friday, October 31 with the intention of killing students, but was too inebriated. The next day, fortunately, the youth was found loitering by parked cars and was interviewed by police who delved deeply enough to learn that he had a gun (which had been missing from the family business for several months) and had hidden some homemade bombs at home, with stated intent to kill his parents, a school police officer, teachers and students, and then himself. I was in the area for a family wedding at the time, and saw my niece the day she learned of the news; she noted one of her friends sat adjacent to the youth in Spanish class.

Secondly, my cousin spent six scary hours on lockdown with her students at Delta State University in 2015, when Prof. Shannon Lamb killed his girlfriend, a fellow professor, and himself. She described the experience as surreal and noted that the murdered professor, Ethan Schmidt, had been a friend of hers.

On Oct. 27, 2018, my entire family had a life changing experience. I had just gotten off the phone with my cousin Ellen (above) when I got a panicked call from my then 91-year-old father that there was an active shooter at Tree of Life Synagogue. My parents' congregation, in which I had been raised and which coincidentally I had rejoined as a distance member the previous month, is Dor Hadash. The congregation met on Saturday mornings in the Rabbi's study at Tree of Life, and I knew my Dad was a regular. Luckily for my Dad, he was running late to services and was still at home when the massacre began.

Asw I remember clearly the surreal feeling of watching the New York Times news video online as the awful morning unfolded, staying in touch with my parents by phone, monitoring online who from the congregation I knew was still okay, shown outside the synagogue, and wondering about others....

My husband and I were stunned to see my parent's street corner featured prominently in the reporting. Three blocks from Tree of Life, it had become a staging area for SWAT team vehicles and reporters. My father, still a practicing psychologist at 94, gave interviews from his front door. I recall the visceral sense of danger I felt before Robert Bowers was apprehended, because my 89-year-old mother was sitting so close to the main street that they live on, watching these events unfold on television, with none of her children with her, and refusing to move. My husband and I cried quietly. My son, a teenager was quiet and looked numb. My daughter, a college student, suffered in another state and went on to do research on the effects of negative peace on gun ownership, which she presented last month at a conference.

Eleven people were murdered, including Jerry Rabinowitz from my congregation, Dor Hadash, who had been a beloved community physician as well as a devoted member of our congregation.

Do you think, as I do, that Robert Bowers clearly should not have possessed even one gun?

I call upon you to do everything in your power to reduce incidents like these in our state of Connecticut.

Connecticut was the first state in the nation to pass an Extreme Risk Protection Order law, in 1999. It offers a means of last resort, with due process protections, to temporarily remove firearms from individuals judged to be at risk of imminent harm to themselves or others. It has been shown to prevent firearm suicide and stop mass shootings. It is time to strengthen the law so that it works harder to prevent gun violence. In particular, when the protection order expires, it should be a requirement that the subject is no longer at risk of violence before the firearms are returned. That is not the case now.

ERPOs are effective because even though individuals may legally possess guns, they can be dangerous to themselves or others. Background checks are a point-in-time measure that can't detect dangers that family members, friends and co-workers can sense. Individuals considering suicide often give some sign of their intentions. **An FBI study of the pre-attack behaviors of active shooters found on average they displayed four to five observable and concerning behaviors that suggested the possibility of violent intentions.**

Furthermore, risk protection laws are demonstrated to reduce firearm suicide. This is significant in Connecticut where firearm suicide accounts for up to two-thirds of gun deaths. A Duke/Yale/UCONN study reported that for every 10-20 risk protection orders issued under Connecticut's ERPO law, one suicide is prevented. Another study reported that Indiana's extreme risk laws reduced firearm suicide rates 7.5%.

I ask that you favorably report HB-6355 out of committee so that the General Assembly can vote to strengthen our Extreme Risk Protection law so that it works harder to prevent firearm suicide and homicide. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,
Maia Freedman
Stamford, CT